

Commentary

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Abbas Rewrites History, Including His Own

by Omri Ceren

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AHMOUD ABBAS, *FALASTIN A-THAURA* (OFFICIAL PLO JOURNAL), MARCH 1976:



The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from Zionist tyranny but, instead, they abandoned them, **forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland**, and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which Jews used to live.

Mahmoud Abbas, *New York Times*, May 16 2011:



In November 1947, the General Assembly made its recommendation and answered in the affirmative [regarding partition]. Shortly thereafter, **Zionist forces expelled Palestinian Arabs** to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel, and Arab armies intervened. War and further expulsions ensued. Indeed, it was the descendants of these expelled Palestinians who were shot and wounded by Israeli forces on Sunday as they tried to symbolically exercise their right to return to their families' homes.

Abbas opens his *New York Times* op-ed by poignantly recalling how as a young boy he and his family were “forced to leave” their Galilean village of Safed during the tumult. That too, per a 2009 interview that he gave to Al-Palestina TV, is a lie. According to a historical witness who is himself, Abbas and his “well-off” family left their village preemptively, based on feverish conspiracy theories predicting Jewish retribution for the anti-Jewish massacres committed by Arabs during the 1920s. He might have added that Safed’s Arabs very enthusiastically participated in those 1920s massacres, continuing to indulge in pogroms through the 1930s. Of course, those facts would not have made a retribution campaign in Safed any less a fantasy. Arabs weren’t “forced to leave” the village by Jews, except maybe by the Jews who had taken up residence in their minds.

Abbas tells these little fibs are in addition to laying out an eyeroll-inducing timeline, where “Zionist forces expelled Palestinian Arabs to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel, and Arab armies intervened.” What a quick intervention that was. Some might almost say it was nearly instantaneous, in that it happened within a few hours of Israel’s creation.

Now, no one really expects the Palestinians not to peddle historical reveries in which they up and left in the face of a Jewish onslaught and not at the exhortation of invading Arab armies. In theory Jews had an incentive to keep their Arab neighbors from fleeing, in as far as they feared indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas by Arab forces. Arab forces had the opposite incentive, in as far as they intended to shell civilian areas indiscriminately. (By way of illustration, see this Jordanian Colonel’s gleeful account of how the Arab Legion shelled Jerusalem’s “densely populated” Jewish Quarter with mortars until it was ethnically cleansed.)

And so unsurprisingly there are accounts—this one by British Port Office H. C. Stebbens, for example—of how the Arab invasion “was preceded by extensive broadcasts from Cairo, Damascus, Amman, and Beirut to the effect that any Arabs who stayed would be hanged as collaborators with the Jews.” Why *collaborators*? Because they would have been serving as de-facto human shields.

But again, no amount of historical documentation is going to keep people honest about the Palestinians' self-inflicted Nakba. Those are just the terms of the debate. Anti-Israel partisans lie casually, they lie consistently, and they lie even when they're contradicting their own previous lies. Which is a problem, because when arguments are premised on falsehoods there can't be any genuine debate.

As a small example, the real importance of his op-ed is that Abbas seems to set an entirely new precondition for peace talks, which is the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state—a violation of all the Palestinians' previous Oslo I and II commitments. But no one can get to that because it takes hours to untangle how, no, the Israelis haven't been spending the last 60 years wiping out Arabs, and yes, until recently even Abbas was willing to admit that.